

very good!

**PLURALISM & CHRISTIANITY'S
GOOD DEEDS DEFICIT**

by

**Joseph B. Bustillos
Fuller Box 456**

**A Paper Submitted to Dr. Arthur F. Glassar
of the School of World Mission
of Fuller Theological Seminary**

MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter

March 15th

1985

It often amazes me how intelligent Christian writers always seem to make the particular point of Christianity that they are writing about to be the interface, the turning-point, the battlefield upon which all of Christianity will survive or crumble to ashes.¹ They sometimes seem like adolescent bullies with a chip on their shoulders, willing to put out an eye for a minor question of doctrine or practice. They seem to miss the point that the only interface that really matters to the world outside is in the lived out example of those people that call themselves Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity
Every race on the face of earth come to unity
"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."
These, the Master's words, would do us well
But Man's belief, religious creeds, can make him blind
The narrow way is not a narrow mind.
Love eliminates all the fear and hate
it illuminates the soul
Love will make us whole.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity
Every race on the face of earth come to unity
Reach a hand to the Hindu mother
And a hand to the Buddhist father in love
("Love one another as I have loved you.")
Hold the hands of a Muslim baby
and you'll see we're all created by God
(All the Image of God)

Sweet salvation calls the nations with His voice
Every man who hears must make the choice
Who are we to know another's heart or mind?
For God alone is judge, He loves all kinds
Love eliminates all the fear and hate
It illuminates the soul
Love will make us whole.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity . . .
"Ubi Caritas Et Amor, Deus Ibi Est,
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor."
- Teri DeSario²

Much of Christian theology often seems to be relegated to that realm of the Other World. We seem to have inherited from the Jews their perspective on reality and the acts of God. Things are understood as being of "that Age" as opposed to "this Age," or "that Dispensation" verses "this Dispensation." Unfortunately this often necessary dichotomizing frequently makes its way into our personal lives, dividing between our theology and our existence, our beliefs and our actions. This is probably nowhere as pronounced as in the area of Pluralism, how we as Christians relate to those that do not share our faith.

It is very easy as a seminary student to wall myself off from the rest of mankind with a mountain of Christian books, only venturing out to make contact with other Christians and to purchase more books. There is a sense of security in this. It's less threatening. And our society seems to be geared to having us keep to ourselves. We go to our little jobs, talk small-talk, go to our little Christian meetings on Sundays and Wednesdays, and try to get ahead of the game (whatever that means).

Then every once in a while something goes wrong. I am stopped in my tracks by the sound of a friend in need. I want so much to help her, but I am helpless to do much of anything except . . . except words of advice and some emotional feedback and My Christianity sometimes feels like such an albatross --- it just hangs there and I don't know what to do with it. To come off and give this person the gospel at this point sounds so much like giving the children scorpions when they asked for fish. No, not because Christianity is a scorpion but because her problem isn't one of religion but one of life.

Besides whenever Christianity is offered as the "Cure-all" not only is the need not really addressed but then everyone pulls out their nasty little tales of woes and hypocrisy that have been tucked away for just such an occasion in a little corner marked "Reasons For Rejecting Religion."

"Tell them anyway," you say, "Toss the seed and don't be too concerned that most of it will be eaten by the birds!" That wouldn't bother me nearly as much if we were just talking about birds or seed but we're not. We're dealing with people and their eternal destinies. "Your problem is that you don't know Jesus Christ." No, that may be a problem but it probably has nothing to do with this problem.

Midday in London
The terrorists were evidently on strike
So we chanced the tube
Subterranean refugees that we were
Up through the sidewalk in Soho
We chanced only the meat pie
A man was being propositioned
It was a middle-aged female prostitute
"I make love for a living:
Want to do business?"
"No thanks, I'm just having a sandwich."

Mister Freddie B. Morris
Insists that we are Communists
He, aided by two bottles of rum
And half his remaining live brain cells
He's crying over his lost wife whom he left
He's going to France
He wishes he could go to Canada
An hour out from Dover
he doesn't feel the deck move beneath our feet

Hollywood on a November night
The volcano's ashes wouldn't fall through the smog blanket
The air casts a shadow . . .
Good and bad news from the same messenger
"Hot and cold running reality" I said to the guy in the next car
Waiting for the light to change
"Leave me alone man
I want to go home."
- Mark Heard³

When did I become so timid about what Jesus means to me? I've never been an extroverted person but this fear seems unnatural. I guess after ten years I'm still shell-shocked from all the casualties I littered the countryside with as a young reckless convert.⁴ There was so much that we did in the name of Jesus that was wrong. And it seems so foolish to long for those days, but sometimes I do. ||

The black and white, the us and the them, the Truth and the lies of the Devil, the Bible and philosophies of man; I remember in high school sitting with my Christian friends at lunch looking out over the senior lawn at the clumps of people and knowing that we weren't like them. In fact one time we got up and in groups of twos we went from clump to clump and preached at them. Nothing intelligible mind you, but we babbled on about Jesus. ✓ And when they shouted at us to sit down and shut up we shouted back that they were going to hell. In my rampage I guess I didn't think about how they felt or what the best way of reaching them would be. I was caught up in the hot passion of religious experience. It was that unutterable encounter with "mysterium tremendum et fascinans".⁵ It was the naked ignorance of the old ways exposed to the brilliant light of the new. It was that primal burst of freedom and destruction. It was "God is love" and "The Church is stupid!" It was confused but knowing, passionate but peaceful, timeless but bond up in the heart of a frustrated fifteen year old boy. || ✓

I took this class to get a better understanding of how one deals with the demands of living in a pluralistic society. I've grown tired of lamely nodding to the silence code of my

generation. I've grown tired of my religious detente, my peaceful co-existence. This isn't to say that I'm going to take up my old Holy Ghost Flamethrower and cook a few sinners for Christ. Not at all. Hopefully I've learned a few things about people and about the way that God moves in the last few years. ✓

In the course of this past quarter I've come to see that though we claim to be a Pluralistic society, that is not the same as saying that we live in a Secularistic-Atheistic Society. Behind Southern California's cosmopolitan facade is a generation of altar boys and daughters of Protestant ministers. Man is a religious animal and those living in Southern California are no exception. Tucked away in the childhood memories of most is a crucifix or a star of David or a crescent moon. And the seed of these childhood memories cannot be erased but later in life will be asked to be addressed to. Thus in our Western society we have a point of continuity between Christianity and our supposed Post-Christian existence.⁶ ✓

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians a point was made that spoke to this issue of Pluralism. It's really a passing comment made on the way to another statement, but in chapter five verse nine and following he writes:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--- not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. (1 Cor 5:9-11a) ✓

One gets the distinct impression that it was not Paul's vision to see the Christian community cut off from the surrounding

unbelievers. Jesus is recorded as saying in Matthew's gospel:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let you light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

This brings us back to an issue that I brought up in the beginning of this paper. That is, while we Christians are busy running about, cutting each others legs off over whether Christ will return before, during or after the tribulation or whether a non-historical Jonah invalidates Christ's resurrection, while we expend so much energy on these "important" issues our non-Christian audience is nowhere closer to seeing that we have an answer to anything (other than filling up empty time and putting kooks on TV).

In a world where nearly everything is measured by what can be seen and observed anybody worth his weight in salt will reject out of hand any supposed "Truth" that is not demonstrated in the life of the person making the claim.⁷ The vagueness of life is bad enough without having to deal with some nebulous religion that doesn't even seem to be working in the lives of those that claim it. I really don't think enough can be written about this point. Don't talk to me about truth claims, show me your life.

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." (James 2:18b-22)

This train of thought should not be brushed aside as some sort of Salvation-by-works game. It's not a question of Salvation-by-works, but if your Salvation doesn't produce any works than is it true? How can it be true? Again: show me something that works in the Real World.

We do the Lord a disservice when we fail to take seriously his call to discipleship. If we are not serious enough to see the dilemma that our "good deeds deficit" is creating in the eyes of our non-Christian neighbors than two thousand years of Christian history has taught us nothing. In the eleven years that I have sat in churches an overwhelming percentage of time spent in the pulpit has been devoted to evangelizing the saved or dealing with problems generated because of Christians' narcissistic inability to see beyond themselves. What I am trying to communicate, in my own stammering way, is that the American church (at least my generation) has come of age years ago. And it's long past time to take what we know and live it. Let the Evidentialists ramble on about the Uniqueness of Christ (which I believe) and the Inerrant testimony of Scripture (which I also believe) but as long as these "other things remain undone" (justice, mercy and faithfulness - Matthew 23:23) the world and our non-Christian neighbors will turn a deaf ear.

FOOTNOTES

¹Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), the whole book. Josh McDowell, Daniel in the Critics Den, (San Bernardino, California: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1979), p 3. Francis A. Schaeffer, The Great Evangelical Disaster, (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984), pp 43ff. The question of Biblical Inerrancy is a critical one, but for the non-Christian it remains a non-issue as long as we fail to demonstrate love for each other.] ✓

²Teri DeSario, "A Call To Us All" off the album of the same name, Dayspring Music, 1983.

³Mark Heard, liner notes off the "Stop the Dominoes" album, Fingerprint Communications, 1981.

⁴This may seem odd but I wanted to dedicate this paper to those in my life who have put up with me over the years and have seen me through my babbling younger years as a Christian to my present state of babbling. I love you and appreciate the patience. I didn't know where to fit a dedication in so I thought that this would be an appropriate spot. ||

⁵Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.

⁶Unfortunately this is not as readily true in the East. Though I believe points of continuity exist this should not be interpreted in any way as saying that there are genuine salvific elements in these other religions. Their value is in the sincerity of the human expression of their desire to be united with the Divine, but in so much that they exclude or preempt Christ whatever value they might have had is viewed as a liability. ||

⁷It will be noticed that this paragraph and the next is virtually lifted from my treatment on the Lausanne Occasional Papers (no. 10: Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics) pp 2ff. I couldn't help it. I liked the way it came out. ✓

Joseph B. Bustillos
110 North Euclid
Fullerton, CA 92632
(714) 525-2155

Approximately 2,000 words
First Serial Rights
Copyrights 1985 Joseph B. Bustillos

**PLURALISM & CHRISTIANITY'S
GOOD DEEDS DEFICIT**

by

Joseph B. Bustillos

It often amazes me how intelligent Christian writers always seem to make the particular point of Christianity that they are writing about to be the interface, the turning-point, the battlefield upon which all of Christianity will survive or crumble to ashes.¹ They sometimes seem like adolescent bullies with a chip on their shoulders, willing to put out an eye for a minor question of doctrine or practice. They seem to miss that if there is a point that really matters to the world outside it is in the lived out example of those people that call themselves

¹Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976). Josh McDowell, Daniel in the Critics Den, (San Bernardino, California: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1979), p 3. Francis A. Schaeffer, The Great Evangelical Disaster, (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984), pp 43ff. The question of Biblical Inerrancy is a critical one, but for the non-Christian it remains a non-issue as long as we fail to demonstrate love for each other.

Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity
Every race on the face of earth come to unity
"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."
These, the Master's words, would do us well
But Man's belief, religious creeds, can make him blind
The narrow way is not a narrow mind.
- Teri DeSario²

Much of Christian theology often seems to be relegated to that realm of the Other World. We seem to have inherited from the Jews their perspective on reality and the acts of God. Things are understood as being of "that Age" as opposed to "this Age," or "that Dispensation" verses "this Dispensation." Frequently, Unfortunately, this often necessary dichotomizing makes its way into our personal lives, dividing between our theology and our existence, our beliefs and our actions. This is probably nowhere as pronounced as in the area of Pluralism, how we as Christians relate to those that do not share our faith.

As a seminary student, it is very easy to wall myself off from the rest of mankind with a mountain of Christian books; then only venturing out to make contact with other Christians or to purchase more books. There seems to be a sense of security in this. It's less threatening. And our society seems to be geared to having us keep to ourselves. We go to our little jobs, talk small-talk, go to our little Christian meetings on Sundays and Wednesdays, and try to get ahead of the game.

Then every once in a while something goes wrong. I am stopped in my tracks by the sounds of a friend in need. I want

²Teri DeSario, "A Call To Us All" off the album of the same name, Dayspring Music, 1983.

so much to help her, but I am helpless to do much of anything except . . . except words of advice and some emotional feedback and My Christianity sometimes feels like such an albatross --- it just hangs there and I don't know what to do with it. To come off and give this person the gospel at this particular moment sounds so much like giving the children scorpions when they asked for fish. No, not because Christianity is a scorpion but because her problem isn't one of religion but one of life. Besides whenever Christianity is offered as the "Cure-all" not only is the original need rarely really addressed to but then everyone pulls out their nasty little tales of woes and hypocrisy that have been tucked away for just such an occasion in a little corner marked "Reasons For Rejecting Religion."

"Tell them anyway," you say, "Toss the seed and don't be too concerned that most of it will be eaten by the birds!" That wouldn't bother me nearly as much if we were just talking about birds or seed but we're not. We're dealing with people and their eternal destinies. "Your problem is that you don't know Jesus Christ." No, that may be a problem but it probably has nothing to do with this problem.

Mister Freddie B. Morris
Insists that we are Communists
He, aided by two bottles of rum
And half his remaining live brain cells
He's crying over his lost wife whom he left

He's going to France
He wishes he could go to Canada
An hour out from Dover
he doesn't feel the deck move beneath our feet.
- Mark Heard³

When did I become so timid about what Jesus means to me? I've never been an extroverted person but this fear seems unnatural. I guess after ten years I'm still shell-shocked from all the casualties I littered the countryside with as a young reckless convert. There was so much that we did in the name of Jesus that was wrong. And it seems so foolish to long for those days, but sometimes I do.

The black and white, the us and the them, the Truth and the lies of the Devil, the Bible and philosophies of man; I remember in high school sitting with my Christian friends at lunch looking out over the senior lawn at the clumps of people and knowing that we weren't like them. In fact one time we got up and in groups of twos we went from clump to clump and preached at them. Nothing intelligible mind you, we just babbled on about Jesus. And when they shouted at us to sit down and shut up we shouted back that they were going to hell. In my rampage I guess I didn't think about how they felt or what the best way of reaching them would be. I was caught up in the hot passion of religious experience. It was that unutterable encounter with mysterium tremendum et fascinans.⁴ It was the naked ignorance of the old

³Mark Heard, liner notes off the "Stop the Dominoes" album, Fingerprint Communications, 1981.

⁴Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.

ways exposed to the brilliant light of the new. It was that primal burst of freedom and destruction. It was "God is love" and "The Church is stupid!" It was confused but knowing, passionate but peaceful, timeless but bond up in the heart of a frustrated fifteen year old boy.

I took a class at Fuller Seminary on Pluralism to get a better understanding of how one deals with the demands of living in a pluralistic society. I've grown tired of lamely nodding to the silence code of my generation. I've grown tired of my religious detente, my peaceful co-existence. This isn't to say that I'm going to take up my old Holy Ghost Flamethrower and cook a few sinners for Christ. Not at all. Hopefully I've learned a few things about people and about the way that God moves in the last few years.

In the course of this past quarter I've come to see that the claim that we are a Pluralistic society is not necessarily the same as saying that we live in a Secular-Atheistic Society. Even behind the cosmopolitan facade of such a place as my Southern California there is a generation of altar boys and daughters of Protestant ministers. Man is a religious animal and those living in Southern California are no exception. Tucked away in the childhood memories of most is a crucifix or a star of David or a crescent moon. And the seed of these childhood memories cannot simply be erased, but later in life will be addressed to. Thus in our Western society we have a point of continuity between

Christianity and our supposed Post-Christian existence.⁵

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians a point was made that spoke to this issue of Pluralism. It's really a passing comment made on the way to another statement, but in chapter five verse nine and following he writes:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--- not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. (1 Cor 5:9-11a)

One gets the distinct impression that it was not Paul's vision to see the Christian community cut off from the surrounding unbelievers. Jesus is recorded as saying in Matthew's gospel:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

This brings us back to an issue that I made in the beginning of this paper. That is, while we Christians are busy running about, cutting each others legs off over whether Christ will return before, during or after the tribulation or whether a non-historical Jonah invalidates Christ's resurrection, while we

⁵Unfortunately this is not as readily true in the Orient. Though I believe points of continuity exist this should not be interpreted in any way as saying that there are genuine salvific elements in these other religions. Their value is in the sincerity of the human expression of their desire to be united with the Divine, but in so much that they exclude or preempt Christ whatever value they might have had is viewed as a liability.

expend so much energy on these "important" issues our non-Christian audience is nowhere closer to seeing that we have an answer to anything (other than filling up empty time and putting kooks on TV).

In a world where nearly everything is measured by what can be seen and observed, anyone worth his or her weight in salt would reject unhesitantly any supposed "Truth" that is not demonstrated in the life of the person making the claim. The vagueness of life is bad enough without having to deal with some nebulous religion that doesn't even seem to be working in the lives of those that claim it. I really don't think enough can be written about this point. Don't talk to me about truth claims, show me your life.

. . . Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But if someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that---and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (James 2:17b-20)

This train of thought should not be brushed aside as some sort of Salvation-by-works game. It's not a question of Salvation-by-works, but if your Salvation doesn't produce any works than is it true? How can it be true? Again: show me something that works in the Real World.

We do the Lord a disservice when we fail to take seriously his call to discipleship. If we are not serious enough to see the dilemma that our "good deeds deficit" is creating in the eyes of our non-Christian neighbors than two thousand years of Christianity has taught us nothing. In the eleven years that I

have sat in churches an overwhelming percentage of time spent in the pulpit has been devoted to evangelizing the saved or dealing with problems generated because of Christians' narcissistic inability to see beyond themselves. What I am trying to communicate, in my own stammering way, is that the American church (at least my generation) has come of age years ago. And it's long past time to take what we know and live it. Let the Evidentialists ramble on about the Uniqueness of Christ (which I believe) and the Inerrant testimony of Scripture (which I also believe) but as long as these "other things remain undone" (justice, mercy and faithfulness - Matthew 23:23) the world and our non-Christian neighbors will turn a deaf ear.

XXX

Joseph B. Bustillos
110 North Euclid
Fullerton, CA 92632
(714) 525-2155

Approximately 2,000 words
First Serial Rights
Copyrights 1985 Joseph B. Bustillos

**PLURALISM & CHRISTIANITY'S
GOOD DEEDS DEFICIT**

by

Joseph B. Bustillos

It often amazes me how intelligent Christian writers always seem to make the particular point of Christianity that they are writing about to be the interface, the turning-point, the battlefield upon which all of Christianity will survive or crumble to ashes.¹ They sometimes seem like adolescent bullies with a chip on their shoulders, willing to put out an eye for a minor question of doctrine or practice. They seem to miss that if there is a point that really matters to the world outside it is in the lived out example of those people that call themselves Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity
Every race on the face of earth come to unity
"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."
These, the Master's words, would do us well
But Man's belief, religious creeds, can make him blind
The narrow way is not a narrow mind.
- Teri DeSario²

Much of Christian theology often seems to be relegated to that realm of the Other World. We seem to have inherited from the Jews their perspective on reality and the acts of God. Things are understood as being of "that Age" as opposed to "this Age," or "that Dispensation" verses "this Dispensation." Frequently, Unfortunately, this often necessary dichotomizing makes its way into our personal lives, dividing between our theology and our existence, our beliefs and our actions. This is probably nowhere as pronounced as in the area of Pluralism, how we as Christians relate to those that do not share our faith.

As a seminary student, it is very easy to wall myself off from the rest of mankind with a mountain of Christian books; then only venturing out to make contact with other Christians or to purchase more books. There seems to be a sense of security in this. It's less threatening. And our society seems to be geared to having us keep to ourselves. We go to our little jobs, talk small-talk, go to our little Christian meetings on Sundays and Wednesdays, and try to get ahead of the game.

Then every once in a while something goes wrong. I am stopped in my tracks by the sounds of a friend in need. I want so much to help her, but I am helpless to do much of anything except . . . except words of advice and some emotional feedback and My Christianity sometimes feels like such an albatross --- it just hangs there and I don't know what to do with it. To come off and give this person the gospel at this particular moment sounds so much like giving the children scorpions when they asked for fish. No, not because Christianity is a scorpion but because her problem isn't one of religion but

one of life. Besides whenever Christianity is offered as the "Cure-all" not only is the original need rarely really addressed to but then everyone pulls out their nasty little tales of woes and hypocrisy that have been tucked away for just such an occasion in a little corner marked "Reasons For Rejecting Religion."

"Tell them anyway," you say, "Toss the seed and don't be too concerned that most of it will be eaten by the birds!" That wouldn't bother me nearly as much if we were just talking about birds or seed but we're not. We're dealing with people and their eternal destinies. "Your problem is that you don't know Jesus Christ." No, that may be a problem but it probably has nothing to do with this problem.

Mister Freddie B. Morris
Insists that we are Communists
He, aided by two bottles of rum
And half his remaining live brain cells
He's crying over his lost wife whom he left
He's going to France
He wishes he could go to Canada
An hour out from Dover
he doesn't feel the deck move beneath our feet.
- Mark Heard³

When did I become so timid about what Jesus means to me? I've never been an extroverted person but this fear seems unnatural. I guess after ten years I'm still shell-shocked from all the casualties I littered the countryside with as a young reckless convert. There was so much that we did in the name of Jesus that was wrong. And it seems so foolish to long for those days, but sometimes I do.

The black and white, the us and the them, the Truth and the

lies of the Devil, the Bible and philosophies of man; I remember in high school sitting with my Christian friends at lunch looking out over the senior lawn at the clumps of people and knowing that we weren't like them. In fact one time we got up and in groups of twos we went from clump to clump and preached at them. Nothing intelligible mind you, we just babbled on about Jesus. And when they shouted at us to sit down and shut up we shouted back that they were going to hell. In my rampage I guess I didn't think about how they felt or what the best way of reaching them would be. I was caught up in the hot passion of religious experience. It was that unutterable encounter with mysterium tremendum et fascinans.⁴ It was the naked ignorance of the old ways exposed to the brilliant light of the new. It was that primal burst of freedom and destruction. It was "God is love" and "The Church is stupid!" It was confused but knowing, passionate but peaceful, timeless but bond up in the heart of a frustrated fifteen year old boy.

I took a class at Fuller Seminary on Pluralism to get a better understanding of how one deals with the demands of living in a pluralistic society. I've grown tired of lamely nodding to the silence code of my generation. I've grown tired of my religious detente, my peaceful co-existence. This isn't to say that I'm going to take up my old Holy Ghost Flamethrower and cook a few sinners for Christ. Not at all. Hopefully I've learned a few things about people and about the way that God moves in the last few years.

In the course of this past quarter I've come to see that the

claim that we are a Pluralistic society is not necessarily the same as saying that we live in a Secular-Atheistic Society. Even behind the cosmopolitan facade of such a place as my Southern California there is a generation of altar boys and daughters of Protestant ministers. Man is a religious animal and those living in Southern California are no exception. Tucked away in the childhood memories of most is a crucifix or a star of David or a crescent moon. And the seed of these childhood memories cannot simply be erased, but later in life will be addressed to. Thus in our Western society we have a point of continuity between Christianity and our supposed Post-Christian existence.⁵

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians a point was made that spoke to this issue of Pluralism. It's really a passing comment made on the way to another statement, but in chapter five verse nine and following he writes:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people--- not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. (1 Cor 5:9-11a)

One gets the distinct impression that it was not Paul's vision to see the Christian community cut off from the surrounding unbelievers. Jesus is recorded as saying in Matthew's gospel:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

This brings us back to an issue that I made in the beginning of

this paper. That is, while we Christians are busy running about, cutting each others legs off over whether Christ will return before, during or after the tribulation or whether a non-historical Jonah invalidates Christ's resurrection, while we expend so much energy on these "important" issues our non-Christian audience is nowhere closer to seeing that we have an answer to anything (other than filling up empty time and putting kooks on TV).

In a world where nearly everything is measured by what can be seen and observed, anyone worth his or her weight in salt would reject unhesitantly any supposed "Truth" that is not demonstrated in the life of the person making the claim. The vagueness of life is bad enough without having to deal with some nebulous religion that doesn't even seem to be working in the lives of those that claim it. I really don't think enough can be written about this point. Don't talk to me about truth claims, show me your life.

. . . Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But if someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that---and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? (James 2:17b-20)

This train of thought should not be brushed aside as some sort of Salvation-by-works game. It's not a question of Salvation-by-works, but if your Salvation doesn't produce any works than is it true? How can it be true? Again: show me something that works in the Real World.

We do the Lord a disservice when we fail to take seriously

his call to discipleship. If we are not serious enough to see the dilemma that our "good deeds deficit" is creating in the eyes of our non-Christian neighbors than two thousand years of Christianity has taught us nothing. In the eleven years that I have sat in churches an overwhelming percentage of time spent in the pulpit has been devoted to evangelizing the saved or dealing with problems generated because of Christians' narcissistic inability to see beyond themselves. What I am trying to communicate, in my own stammering way, is that the American church (at least my generation) has come of age years ago. And it's long past time to take what we know and live it. Let the Evidentialists ramble on about the Uniqueness of Christ (which I believe) and the Inerrant testimony of Scripture (which I also believe) but as long as these "other things remain undone" (justice, mercy and faithfulness - Matthew 23:23) the world and our non-Christian neighbors will turn a deaf ear.

ENDNOTES

¹Harold Lindsell, The Battle for the Bible, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976). Josh McDowell, Daniel in the Critics Den, (San Bernardino, California: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1979), p 3. Francis A. Schaeffer, The Great Evangelical Disaster, (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1984), pp 43ff. The question of Biblical Inerrancy is a critical one, but for the non-Christian it remains a non-issue as long as we fail to demonstrate love for each other.

²Teri DeSario, "A Call To Us All" off the album of the same name, Dayspring Music, 1983.

³Mark Heard, liner notes off the "Stop the Dominoes" album, Fingerprint Communications, 1981.

⁴Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.

⁵Unfortunately this is not as readily true in the Orient. Though I believe points of continuity exist this should not be interpreted in any way as saying that there are genuine salvific elements in these other religions. Their value is in the sincerity of the human expression of their desire to be united with the Divine, but in so much that they exclude or preempt Christ whatever value they might have had is viewed as a liability.

XXX

PLURALISM:
IS THERE A PRACTICAL SIDE TO CHRISTIANITY?

by

Joseph B. Bustillos
Fuller Box 456

A Paper Submitted to Dr. Arthur F. Glassar
of the School of World Mission
of Fuller Theological Seminary

MT 533: Theology of Religious Encounter

March 15th

1985

It often amazes me how intelligent Christian writers always seem to make the particular point of Christianity that they are writing about to be the interface, the turning-point, the battlefield upon which all of Christianity will survive or crumble to ashes.¹ They sometimes seem like adolescent bullies with a chip on their shoulders, willing to put out an eye for a minor question of doctrine or practice. They seem to miss the point that the only interface that really matters to the world outside is in the lived out example of those people that call themselves Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity
Every race on the face of earth come to unity
"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."
These, the Master's words, would do us well
But Man's belief, religious creeds, can make him blind
The narrow way is not a narrow mind.
Love eliminates all the fear and hate
it illuminates the soul
Love will make us whole.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity
Every race on the face of earth come to unity
Reach a hand to the Hindu mother
And a hand to the Buddhist father in love
("Love one another as I have loved you.")
Hold the hands of a Muslim baby
and you'll see we're all created by God
(All the Image of God)

Sweet salvation calls the nations with His voice
Every man who hears must make the choice
Who are we to know another's heart or mind?
For God alone is judge, He loves all kinds
Love eliminates all the fear and hate
It illuminates the soul
Love will make us whole.

There's a call to us all to love all humanity . . .
"Ubi Caritas Et Amor, Deus Ibi Est,
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor."
- ("A Call to Us All") - Teri DeSario²

Much of Christian theology often seems to be relegated to that realm of the Other World. We seemed to have inherited from the Jews their perspective on reality and the acts of God. Things are understood as being of "that Age" as opposed to "this Age," or "that Dispensation" verses "this Dispensation." Unfortunately this often necessary dichotomizing frequently makes its way into our personal lives, dividing between our theology and our existence, our beliefs and our actions. This is probably nowhere as pronounced as in the area of Pluralism, how we as Christians relate to those that do not share our faith.

It is very easy as a seminary student to wall myself off from the rest of mankind with a mountain of Christian books, only venturing out to make contact with other Christians and to purchase more books. There is a sense of security in this. It's less threatening. And our society seems to be geared to having us keep to ourselves. We go to our little jobs, talk small-talk, go to our little Christian meetings on Sundays and Wednesdays, and try to get ahead of the game (whatever that means). Then every once in a while something goes wrong. I am stopped in my tracks by the sound of a friend in need. I want so much to help her, but I am helpless to do much of anything except . . . except words of advice and some emotional feedback and My Christianity sometimes feels like such an albatross --- it just hangs there and I don't know what to do with it. To come off and give this person the gospel at this point sounds so much like giving the children scorpions when they asked for fish. No, not because Christianity is a scorpion but because her problem isn't one of religion but one of life. Besides whenever Christianity

is offered as the "Cure-all" not only is the need not really addressed but then everyone pulls out their nasty little tales of woes and hypocrisy that have been tucked away for just such an occasion in a little corner marked "Reasons For Rejecting Religion."

"Tell them anyway," you say, "Toss the seed and don't be too concerned that most of it will be eaten by the birds!" That wouldn't bother me nearly as much if we were just talking about birds or seed but we're not. We're dealing with people and their eternal destinies. "Your problem is that you don't know Jesus Christ." No, that may be a problem but it probably has nothing to do with this problem.

Midday in London
The terrorists were evidently on strike
So we chanced the tube
Subterranean refugees that we were
Up through the sidewalk in Soho
We chanced only the meat pie
A man was being propositioned
It was a middle-aged female prostitute
"I make love for a living:
Want to do business?"
"No thanks, I'm just having a sandwich."

Mister Freddie B. Morris
Insists that we are Communists
He, aided by two bottles of rum
And half his remaining live brain cells
He's crying over his lost wife whom he left
He's going to France
He wishes he could go to Canada
An hour out from Dover
he doesn't feel the deck move beneath our feet

Hollywood on a November night
The volcano's ashes wouldn't fall through the smog blanket
The air casts a shadow . . .
Good and bad news from the same messenger

"Hot and cold running reality"
I said to the guy in the next car
Waiting for the light to change
"Leave me alone man
I want to go home."

- Mark Heard³

When did I become so timid about what Jesus means to me?
I've never been an extroverted person but this fear seems
unnatural. I guess after ten years I'm still shell-shocked from
all the casualties I littered the countryside with as a young
reckless convert. There was so much that we did in the name of
Jesus that was wrong. And it seems so foolish to long for those
days, but sometimes I do.

The black and white, the us and the them, the Truth and the
lies of the Devil, the Bible and philosophies of man; I remember
in high school sitting with my Christian friends at lunch looking
out over the senior lawn at the clumps of people and knowing that
we weren't like them. In fact one time we got up and in groups
of twos we went from clump to clump and preached at them.
Nothing intelligible mind you, but we babbled on about Jesus.
And when they shouted at us to sit down and shut up we shouted
back that they were going to go to hell. In my rampage I guess I
didn't think about how they felt or what the best way of reaching
them would be. I was caught up in the hot passion of religious
experience. It was that unutterable encounter with "mysterium
tremendum et fascinans".⁴ It was the naked ignorance of the old
ways exposed to the brilliant light of the new. It was that
primal burst of freedom and destruction. It was "God is love"
and "The Church is stupid!" It was confused but knowing,
passionate but peaceful, timeless but bond up in the heart of a

frustrated fifteen year old boy.

And I've also lost that dividing wall that I placed between myself and my Jesuit professors, every once in a while hurling a round of artillery over it. Something was obviously wrong with my methodology back then. I didn't seem to care if they recognized my understanding of the Bible nor did I seem to be overly concerned that our exchanges would or wouldn't bear any fruit.

Whatever happened to my humanity? When did I start pulling away from a person who is in the midst of crisis thinking, "She wouldn't be interested to hear that." Why can't I get under someone's skin with my Christianity intact? And why does it have to involve someone's crisis? What happens when the crisis is over? There may be a believer in every foxhole but there's a whore in every port.

Something is obviously wrong. My Pluralism looks more like Detente, peaceful co-existence and sell them some wheat whenever they need it. I've long since lost that platform (literal Biblicism) from which I battered my family as a young zealous convert.

PLURALITY AND REALITY

<PLURALITY AND REALITY>

THE EXISTENCE OF PLURALISM IN THE FACE OF RELIGION.

PLURALISM AS PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE.

THE MULTIPLICITY OF RELIGIOUS CLAIMS & THE INABILITY TO "REALLY"

KNOW.

These days
we put on cars like shoes
And walk faster
We form lines and remain mute
almost unaware of the walkers around us
as we transcend space
we put on wings like a coat
And spend morning and evening in separate worlds
Instant schizophrenia
As we transcend time

Maps hide cities
And cities hide houses
And houses hide faces
And faces hide hearts
But hearts still beat quietly
Few feel even their own pulse
But hearts are made to beat
We can drown them out with more accessible rhythms
But they continue the counterpoint
Hearts are made to beat
Our souls are still within us
Our Creator waits for us to notice
As our geographical boundaries
Are chased around the sun by time
Decaying in a fashion some call normal.

FOOTNOTES

¹Josh McDowell, Daniel, (San Bernadino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, International, 19@@), p. 3. Francis Scheaffer, The Great Evangelical Disaster, (), .

²Teri DeSario, "A Call To Us All" off the album of the same name, Dayspring Music, 1983.

³Mark Heard, liner notes off the "Stop the Dominoes" album, Fingerprint Communications, 1981.

⁴Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.

PLURALISM:
IS THERE A PRACTICAL SIDE TO CHRISTIANITY?

" . . . They seem to miss the point that the only interface that really matters to the world outside is the lived out example of those people that call themselves Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians."

I. INTRODUCTION

"A Call to Us All," Teri DeSario.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Religious Pluralism

1. What is Pluralism?
2. Is Pluralism a recent phenomenon?
3. Religion and Pluralism:
 - a. advantages of being in a Pluralistic society
 - b. disadvantages . . .

B. Christianity

1. What do we mean by "Christianity"?
2. Christianity and Culture (Western Civilization):
 - a. The chicken and the egg
 - b. Advantages of the "Historic Christian Phenomenon."
 - c. Disadvantages . . .

III. OVERVIEW

A. After 2,000 years of Christian Interaction in the West what do we have? (Briefly . . .)

1. The Roman Experience
2. The Kingdom of God
3. The Rise of Nationalism
4. The Renaissance
5. The Reformation
6. The Enlightenment
7. The Industrial Age
8. The World at War
9. Prosperity and Dispair
10. The East

B. Consistent points of conflict:

1. Truth Claims (multiple religious environment)

C. Culture

III. Conflict

A. Pluralism and Christianity

1. Truth Claims (multiple religions)

B. Pluralism and Culture

1. Individual thinking and basic concepts

C. Christianity and Culture

1. The chicken and the egg

IV. Responses:

A. The Frailty of Examples.

- B. Separating the Wheat from the Chaff.
- C. Basic Truth.

PLURALISM:
IS THERE A PRACTICAL SIDE TO CHRISTIANITY?

"... They seem to miss the point that the only interface that really matters to the world outside is the lived out example of those people that call themselves Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians."

I. INTRODUCTION

"A Call to Us All," Teri DeSario.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Religious Pluralism

1. What is Pluralism?
2. Is Pluralism a recent phenomenon? <contrary to Samartha p. 66 re: the NT writers not knowing anything beyond their Semitic faith>

B. Christianity

1. What do we mean by "Christianity"? <Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 10, p. 7>
2. Christianity in its historical context:
 - a. The chicken and the egg
 - b. Christianity today in view of Christianity yesterday:
 - 1) The Roman Experience (infancy, millennialism)
 - 2) Medieval Europe (The Kingdom of God, authority)
 - 3) The Rise of Nationalism/Renaissance/Reformation (political/spiritual unrest: trouble in paradise)
 - 4) The Enlightenment/The Industrial Age (Knowledge explosion, Infancy of Technology)
 - 5) The World at War/Prosperity and Dispair (Testing Western Civilization)
 - 6) The East (Looking for greener grass)

III. THE POINT OF CONFLICT:

- A. Religious Truth Claims: "How can you say that Christianity is the only true religion?"
- B. The Existence of Evil: "If God is so good then why . . . ?"
- C. The Gap between Faith and Practice: "2,000 years to get it right . . ."

IV. TOWARD A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE:

A. Actions:

1. Christ's Example:
 - a. Obedient to God
 - b. Concerned for the Welfare of others

- 2. Paul's Example:
 - a. Servant
 - b. unafraid to be an example
- B. Words:
 - 1. Christ's Example:
 - a. with authority
 - b. dialogical
 - 2. Paul's Example:
- C. Trust:

PLURALISM: NOTES

PERSONAL ADDENDUM:

Often finding myself preoccupied with visions of academic respectability and a deepened acquaintance with the gears and wheels that entail the inner workings of a successful Christian organization I am regularly stopped in my tracks by the sound of a friend in need. I want so much to help her, but I am helpless to do much of anything except . . . except words of advice and some emotional feedback and My Christianity sometimes feels like such an albatross --- it just hangs there and I don't know what to do with it, even in this "obvious" situation. It sounds so much like giving the children scorpions when they asked for fish, to offer Christianity to this persons in her moment of need. No, not because Christianity is a scorpion or an albatross for that matter, but because it is sometimes so hard to see Christ in Christianity (and that's for Christians, what's the poor soul on the outside going to see?); besides everyone has their nasty little tale of woe and hypocrisy tucked away in a little corner marked "Reasons For Rejecting Religion."

"Tell them anyway," you say, "Toss the seed and don't be too concerned that most of it will be eaten by the birds!" The problem is that we're not talking about birds or seed but about people. "Your problem is that you don't know Jesus Christ." No, that may be a problem but it probably has nothing to do with this problem.

Whatever happened to my humanity? When did I start pulling away from a person who is in the midst of crisis thinking, "She

wouldn't be interested to hear that." Why can't I get under someone's skin with my Christianity intact? And why does it have to involve someone's crisis? What happens when the crisis is over? There may be a believer in every foxhole but there's a whore in every port.

Something is obviously wrong. My Pluralism looks more like Detente, peaceful co-existence and sell them some wheat whenever they need it. I've long since lost that platform (literal Biblicism) from which I battered my family as a young zealous convert. And I've also lost that dividing wall that I placed between myself and my Jesuit professors, every once in a while hurling a round of artillery over it. Something was obviously wrong with my methodology back then. I didn't seem to care if they recognized my understanding of the Bible nor did I seem to be overly concerned that our exchanges would or wouldn't bear any fruit. It was the hot passion of religious experience. It was that unutterable encounter with the "mysterium tremendum et fascinans"#note :<Herbert Ryan, S.J., Exploring Christian Mysticism (RS 160), Loyola Marymount University, Fall 1976.>. It was the naked ignorance of the old ways exposed to the brilliant light of the new. It was that primal burst of freedom and destruction. It was "God is love" and "The Church is stupid!" It was confused but knowing, passionate but peaceful, timeless but bond up in the heart of a frustrated fifteen year old boy.

PLURALITY AND REALITY

Natalie, when you wake up in the mornin'
do your infant eyes give you warnin'
about the things you'll see today?

Little one, for you the touch of life has just begun,
seeing your bright smile gives me such a joy
as you offer me your toy.

And all you ask is for a hand of open love
given, oh so free,
never knowing the example you set for me.

Daddy's gone but you still find room in your heart for a song,
it may not seem like much of a song to me,
but little one you are so free.

And all you ask is for a hand of open love
given, oh so free,
never knowing the example you set for me.

Mommy tries, though alone at night she often cries
trying hard to provide away for you
to see that God's love is still true.

Natalie, when you wake up in the mornin'
do your infant eyes give you warnin'
about the things you'll see today?

And all you ask is for a hand of open love . . .#note :
<Joseph B. Bustillos, Natalie, copyright 1980.>

Much of Christian theology often seems to be relegated to that realm of the Other World. Things are spoken of as being of "that Age" as opposed to "this Age," or "that Dispensation" verses "this Dispensation," or the "Old Covenant" and the "New Covenant." Unfortunately this often necessary dichotomizing frequently makes its way into our personal lives dividing between our theology and our existence, our beliefs and our actions. This is probably nowhere as pronounced as in the area of Pluralism, how individuals who believe that faith in Christ is

necessary to insure one's salvation yet manage to work and live day in and day out with non-Christians with little concern or guilt.

<PLURALITY AND REALITY>

THE EXISTENCE OF PLURALISM IN THE FACE OF RELIGION.

PLURALISM AS PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE.

THE MULTIPLICITY OF RELIGIOUS CLAIMS & THE INABILITY TO "REALLY" KNOW.

Pluralism:

Is There a Practicall side to Xnty?

"... They seem to miss the point that the only interface that really matters to the world outside is ~~the~~ the lived-out ~~existence~~ (experience) example of those people that call themselves Christians among those that do not call themselves Christians."

I. Intro

Christians."

"A Call to us All" Teri DeVries

Pluralism

A. Defined

III Problems

A. Truth Claims (multiple religions)

B. Culture (individual thinking & basic concepts)

C. Authority (scripture in an abiblical world)

IV App Responses

A. The Faithful & Examples

B. Separating the Wheat from the Chaff.

C. Basic Truth.

X

I. Intro

II. Definitions

A. Pluralism -

B. Creativity -

C. Culture

III. Problem